

Comments on Public Agenda study, Voter \Options on Nuclear Arms Policy. 18 November, 1984

"The present gap between the experts and the public is dangerously large." (9) "...members of the public are far more aroused about the dangers of nuclear confrontation than are most experts and therefore have a stronger sense of urgency." (8-9) "And most dramatically, the experts are almost unanimous in regarding as unrealistic the public's sense of imminent danger."

Compare Thomas Powers' "Is Nuclear War 'Impossible'", in the current issue of Atlantic, November 1984. "In the popular mind, at least, nuclear war has always meant the end of the world. Numerous public opinion surveys have shown that the average American expects to die if there is a nuclear war; many even hope that they will die. Until recently military officials, and probably most scientists who take an interest in nuclear strategy, have not shared these apocalyptic fears. Indeed, one badge of the weapons fraternity has been a hardheaded knowledge of how bad nuclear war isn't. But ordinary citizens are difficult to reassure. They're convinced that we passed the point of overkill long ago, not just in rhetoric but in fact." [They were correct-- given nuclear winter/]

*also, greater fear in crises; of instability...
(I was like experts in '62 (at 31); now would be then).*

SCRATCHPAD: 19 Nov 84.

1. The public generally doesn't agree with the "abolitionists" that it is forbidden to threaten (or risk) what one is forbidden to do/carry out. Moreover, as DY reports, they are willing to **risk** war (presumably even nuclear war) to prevent Communist expansion. I.e., they are willing to threaten it; and probably, to prepare for it in order to make such threats credible (at least, up to a point, considering costs). But that is NATO strategy; probably most NATO governments see it the same way, as a "breakaway" alliance that will "surrender preemptively" if necessary. This may not be realistic, but the public views are not necessarily less realistic than those of elites and officials. Explicit talk of winning, surviving, limiting damage and limiting the war can be understood by the public (as it may be understood by at least some of the officials who say these things or countenance their being said) as just talk, intended to enhance the credibility of threats that are essentially bluffs.

*see DY,
p. 73*

2. Thus, the 81% of the public who believe that it is not NATO "policy" to initiate nuclear war in any conditions may be describing what they take to be its actual "action policy," not its declaratory policy (as expressed even in Top Secret Cosmic plans and "preparations.") And this is not without reality.

3. Where both public and officials may be unrealistic is in discounting the empirical, probabilistic (and motivational) link between threats/preparations/capabilities and actual increased likelihood that threatened actions will occur. (See, by the way, Bat Masterson's comments to TR on the problems of an aging

gunfighter, when he refused appointment as a US marshall: and see
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Gregory Peck's "The Gunfighter.")

SCRATCHPAD: Reassurance of R performance in Grenada and Lebanon; calculated risks, readiness to back down, to bluff and lie, to bargain hard, to demonstrate toughness, but carefully. Thus, his policy was seen as invalid and getting risky in Lebanon--but they then saw him back down from it. In Grenada he may have been grandiloquent, but they saw him taking negligible risks. Most clearly thought that the limited casualties were justified not only to rescue American lives, but to restore American pride (and not only to save face for himself and his Administration) after the loss of life in Beirut. Moreover, he did not take terroristic action to retaliate in Lebanon after the bombing, despite his prior threats to do so. In short, they can see his policy as a potentially effective policy of threat and bluff, but trust him to measure the actual risks and act prudently. (Of course, that's what they thought about LBJ after the Tonkin Gulf "reprisals"--and relatively speaking, they were not wrong about LBJ, who was in fact "reluctant" to start the bombing, and still more the invasion. But the public underestimated the momentum of the policy and the threats, and the risks of escalation, just as LBJ did. It was not "all bluff"--if threats ever are!

--likewise Nicaragua: "not invasion", but... (whereas he may set out to demonstrate successful invasion: which may or may not be successful and accepted). *Publicans differ from Grenada. R may not. And if it turned out to be like Grenada...*
--thus acceptance of D-5, SLCM, etc. but not MX--even though former might be seen as FS weapons.

--note today's poll results: people want freeze; but they expect Reagan to seek and achieve arms control agreements. Maybe better prospects than M: buildup, harder bargainer... (almost surely wrong). Their real worries: lack of any negots, any agreements. "As long as they're talking, agreeing..."

--they regard risks of nuclear war as equivalent to the risks of a major accident in a nuclear reactor; could happen any time, unacceptable in the long run, high in the long run (for young, this is only ten years...but it may still be beyond the horizon of consideration in a particular election!)

--might they worry about LOW? Accidental war? Prolif? Have they been told how to reduce the risks of any of these?

--Mondale, after all, did not offer a reduced defense budget; and he accepted the evaluation--as does, apparently, the public--that a technological arms race, rather than a unilateral freeze, is second-best to a bilateral freeze.

The real issue may be: How high a risk will they accept? As high as the officials? How high is the "real" current risk, and how is it affected by: a) new weapons; b) relations with Soviets; c) styles of leadership and bargaining, e.g., between Reagan and Carter/Mondale?

--note again in today's poll results: rather than buying Reagan's rhetoric about government being untrustworthy and useless, his style--including his rhetoric--increases their trust in government and their expectations from it. They regard him as a better manager of the government than his opponents, making it better (not smaller).

--By the same token, the public might shy away from a public espousal of Type II deterrence or "multiple missions," because it would indicate or lead to "excessive" reliance on it and spending for it, even though they would accept some tacit reliance on it. They might fear too-explicit threats because they want bluffs, not commitments or too great a readiness to carry them out.

--In sum, for many reasons the public could be less opposed to weapons purchases, even those that give "first strike capabilities," than they are to officials that they fear might actually get them into nuclear war. Likewise, they fear threats--especially implicit ones--less than wars; and small, carefully calculated and managed "demonstration wars" less than big wars...so long as nuclear weapons are not actually exploded, and US casualties are proportionate to results and lead to success.

--Why are they for a freeze? Because of waste, costs, other needs for money, fear of deficit and inflation? Belief new weapons aren't needed? Desire for some agreement: both lowering tensions and reducing economic burden? Do they prefer freeze--strongly--to SALT II? What do they think of SALT II now? If they like it, is it because we have built up?

--They probably underestimate Reagan's commitment to Type II threats; the risks he would take (like his predecessors); the additional risks that the new weapons, and interventions under current and coming conditions entail; his willingness to intervene, and the likely forms of that. (Just as they expect him to avoid recession, and to cut down the deficit sharply, and to reach arms control agreements. Failure on all three of these may disillusion them within a year or two, and make them newly receptive to criticism of these other judgments).

--The public can believe that Reagan is more likely to get an arms agreement with the Soviets and to avoid (and at least, postpone) nuclear war than is a "weaker" President like Carter or Mondale, even if they disagree with the effectiveness of his bargaining chip approach or his quest for superiority. Even these last can add to (their estimate of) his bargaining strength, even though they don't in themselves cause the Soviets to cease their armaments buildup.

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--It is simply not clear whether the public regards the absence of a freeze as urgently dangerous, or how bad they think it is-- compared to, say, an effort later, or to the negotiation and/or achievement of lesser arms control agreements² (like SALT II--or even START, which would in fact worsen stability, in the ^{same} form of "reductions.") They do not understand--and have not been told by us--that Reagan's reductions in overall numbers, accompanied by the new CF weapons, would be worse than a Freeze that did not reduce weapons but which would foreclose the new weapons. In fact, it would be worse than the present situation, or a situation in which numbers increased without adding CF weapons (e.g., the increases in C-4 Trident I missiles over the last several years).

--The public doesn't simply believe what ^{ever} the President tells them: see their expectation of a tax increase. (In fact, their expectation of new arms control agreements may be a judgment independent of what R has actually said about this).

--Thus, they may see R as a better management of a CW threat system than Mondale; as well as a better manager of the economy, even if his policies end up as similar. (His tax increases will be smaller, and more "fair" to the middle-class: i.e., more heavily loaded on the poor. (The middle-class may figure that the rich will benefit in any case; and they may not be so much against this. Perhaps it is difficult to stir up class hatred of the rich among the middle class who admire and seek to join them.)

--Did M really offer much realistic prospect of a freeze? Not after the second debate; and was this really a shock for most of the electorate? His "commitment" to moratoria was practically a secret to most voters; and his staff had opposed the notion before the Platform Committee anyway.

--Different bases for selling additional weapons to the taxpayers:

a) Type I Deterrence: SU FS capability. (b) RAND/AJW: The difficulties of Type I deterrence; vulnerability, penetration, etc. c) SAC method (as found by Kistiakowsky): ^{operational} difficulties of penetrating, achieving mass and speed, etc.; need for "insurance" (also used by MCN to rationalize large numbers of land and sea-based missiles for Type I). d) Limiting damage, as insurance. e) To intimidate, deter by bluff, prevent unfavorable "image gap": to keep ahead technologically, and imitate all SU capabilities, never fall behind in any dimension. (f) (Regional): ~~need~~ jobs. (to Congress: jobs, votes, bases, profits.

(g) (Not used: real motive): to make FU threats credible, and threats to escalate. (g) Commitments to allies.

--All these to explain purchases without mentioning: Needs of economy and aerospace industry (see Air Force planning in 1945); alliance hegemony in NATO; back-up to US intervention in the Third World, based on FU threats. (h) Maintain tech base, (Aerospace industry) tech superiority

--Thus, even if the public doesn't understand the "official, 'secret' declaratory policy of NATO and the US in the Third World, based on FU threats: the majority might accept it even it were spelled out convincingly, on the assumption that it was basically a bluff and that bluff/threats were acceptable, and necessary. (i) (Congress) Service roles (j) Bargaining chips! (k) pack up Pres in Geneva